

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

March 21, 2006

The Honorable Pete Domenici
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Domenici and Ranking Member Bingaman:

I am writing in regards to the Administration's proposed sale of national forest land to fund the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act for an additional five years. While I am a strong supporter of the Secure Rural Schools Program, I urge you to oppose this specific funding proposal. As you know, the plan would auction off more than 300,000 acres of national forests and other public lands—including about 10,000 acres in North Carolina—in order to generate temporary funding of \$800 million for the Secure Rural Schools Program. The plan also calls for a phased reduction in funding for the Program to zero by 2011.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act has been so important to the livelihood of North Carolina's many rural counties, which rely on these funds for public schools and road maintenance. In fact, I am a cosponsor of a bill that would extend the Act through fiscal year 2013. In light of today's tight budget, it is imperative that we look for offsets for government programs; however, I do not believe it is a wise investment to sell our public lands in return for short-term funding of a program that deserves full-funding on its own—especially when the lands have been selected without the input of local communities and park rangers.

In exchange for its 10,000 wooded acres, North Carolina would get an estimated \$1 million, while more than a quarter of the money raised nationwide would benefit rural schools in Oregon and Washington. It has also been estimated that only about 10 percent of the proceeds would go toward rural schools in the South and Midwest—the two regions where more than a third of the sales would occur.

According to a letter from four former Forest Service chiefs, it is a long-established custom to trade isolated parcels of national forest land for other lands that enhance the national forest system. However, "auctioning off national forest lands, for any purpose beyond enhancement of the national forests, is an unwise precedent."

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Elizabeth Dole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "E" and a long, sweeping "D".